

THE BIN LADENS

AN ARABIAN FAMILY
IN THE AMERICAN CENTURY

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Bakr said later that he “never intervened” with anyone in the Saudi government to help Osama leave the kingdom, “nor was I aware at that time of any involvement by Osama in terrorist activities of any kind.”²² He was, he suggests, passive and accepting of Osama’s decision. The broader credibility of his assertion may depend in part, of course, on the definition of “terrorist activities.” Al Qaeda had been founded three years earlier. Its volunteers still participated in the Afghan civil war; others fought in Yemen or evaded capture by the Egyptian security services from which they had fled. Whether some or all of this violence constituted terrorism lay to some extent in the eye of the beholder. It is also uncertain how much Bakr knew about these militias or Osama’s involvement with them.

The Bin Ladens continued to facilitate financial transfers to Osama. On October 28, 1991, a sum of \$482,034.37—his original deposit, plus accrued interest, less banking fees—was transferred out of Osama’s subaccount at the Swiss Bank Corporation in Geneva to the custody of his half-brother Haider. The transfer occurred during a period when other subaccount holders among Mohamed’s children were taking full control of their own Swiss accounts, now that the war crisis had passed. Osama apparently decided to reorganize his banking within the Islamic world. What became of his dollar deposit after it reached his half-brother Haider is unknown, but there is no indication that it was withheld from Osama. The transfer marks Osama’s last known use of the Western banking system.²³ With a stubborn attitude, but without a coherent plan, he passed into a new life of voluntary exile. His circumstances were more complicated than those of his grandfather Awadh, whose flight from debt almost a century earlier had ultimately birthed the family fortune, but Osama’s instinct was the same: he had no choice, he felt, but to start again.